

FRANKLIN PARK: A CENTURY'S APPRAISAL



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Introduction

This essay was first written in the summer of 1980 and published as the December 1980 issue of The Franklin Park Coalition Bulletin under the title The Social Function - Social Use of Franklin Park.

So impressive was the progress in Franklin Park that the essay was outdated in two years and obsolete by the end of four. It has been completely rewritten.

Franklin Park is a far different park as I write this in March of 1985 than when I completed the first essay in August of 1980. The reason is that Franklin Park is being daily managed by The Franklin Park Coalition and the Boston Parks Department.

Six things occurred over the past five years to bring that about:

- Tax-exempt, non-profit status was awarded to the Coalition by the IRS.
- After nearly a decade as an all-volunteer, neighborhood group, it evolved into an agency with a full-time director and a fund raising program by November of 1980.
- The voters of the Commonwealth chose Proposition 2½ in November of 1980, which substantially reduced property taxes in Massachusetts. It also substantially reduced revenue for cities and towns.
- Mayor Kevin White reduced the Parks Department budget 60% in January of 1981 to about \$5.5 million.
- An innovative Park Commissioner, John Vitagliano, recognized the crisis and moved to address it.
- Robert McCoy became Park Commissioner in February 1982.

What Commissioner Vitagliano only hesitantly agreed to do with The Coalition in the daily management of Franklin Park, Commissioner McCoy has legitimized and institutionalized since 1982.

Park Commissioner McCoy called it Boston Partners in Urban Recreation. The Coalition called it contract maintenance and management. What Elma Lewis had conceived in 1971 as the only thing that could return Franklin Park to the communities of Boston, the Parks Department and The Franklin Park Coalition began to create in 1982: cooperative management agreements - backed up with negotiated dollar figures - between the Parks Department and the community to maintain and manage Franklin Park.

There are three extraordinary facets to this recent history - the first is that The Franklin Park Coalition has always been thoroughly integrated and its leadership has been by a white man since 1978. This in a park that is surrounded on two of its three residential sides by Boston's black community, which uses the park almost exclusively (through no plan except that whites do not frequent the park by their own choice). The second is that the Coalition has been able to raise substantial amounts of money from a cautious, if not skeptical, philanthropic and corporate community; without any type of sophisticated fund raising techniques except telling the truth and doing what you say you'll do. Finally, Franklin Park has been rejuvenated by the Parks Department and the Coalition for a largely low-income black community. This is usually not the general course of events in American cities, where low-income communities do not benefit from well maintained parks. For a variety of reasons, the same community which witnessed the decline of Franklin Park is also appreciating its improvement today.

Richard Heath
March 5, 1985.

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Chapter One

The Purpose of Franklin Park

Franklin Park was and is today Boston's central park, the hub of an enormous system of parks stretching from the Back Bay to the then recently annexed towns of Dorchester, Roxbury and Jamaica Plain. Frederick Law Olmsted, advising the Boston Park Commissioners, recognized that Boston's increasing growth would require large, open spaces for the relaxation and recreation of its citizens. In his 1886 Notes on the Plan of Franklin Park, Olmsted described Franklin Park as having a square mile of relaxing scenery which would ease the harried city dweller. The 527 original acres of Franklin Park (now reduced to 500) were situated in an undeveloped part of the city. Streetcar lines were just beginning to move out to the edge of the park-land and subdivisions began in adjacent blocks as the Park's construction was under way. The property for Franklin Park was purchased between 1881 and 1883: Construction began in the early summer of 1885.

Franklin Park was not situated in the middle of the city but southwest of City Hall, approximately four miles from the Boston Common. In fact, all the sites considered were 4 to 5 miles from the central business, government and residential core of Boston, which had long been built up. Most of the reason for annexing whole townships like Dorchester, Roxbury and West Roxbury was to provide living space for the center city.

Olmsted considered a site outside of the center city as a perfection of his theory of bringing the agrarian ideal to the city; here, he could build his country park with a minimum of architecture. Of all of Olmsted's parks, only Mont Royal Park in Montreal has less architecture than Franklin Park. Boston's central park was connected to the center city by a meandering parkway so that, even while driving to the Park, one never left park land.

The boundaries of Franklin Park were drawn so as to be on main thoroughfares and near existing transportation lines. Entrances were built to coincide with transportation. They were carefully planned to open the Park to as many people as possible, as conveniently as possible. Two thoroughfares today are major routes into the city, and the transportation lines are important trunk lines for the MBTA.

The intent of Franklin Park was to provide an ample country park for Bostonians to refresh themselves from the rigors of city life. The Park was to be (or to appear) as little built-up as possible, with many convenient footpaths leading around the Park. A circuit drive for carriages led into the parkway which connected the other parks in the Olmsted system.

Franklin Park was designed for many uses with five distinct landscaping features: a 100-acre woodland, a 200-acre meadow, a 7-acre artificial pond, a formal entranceway, and a 30-acre playing field. All were interconnected by walks and drives, with three overlooks. Although primarily designed for passive relaxation - in keeping with the times - the carefully landscaped playing field recognized that active sports were becoming more

important in American leisure life. The playing field was segregated from the passive park by landscaping techniques so that the two groups of people - active and less active - would not interfere with each other. To completely shut out the city, a thick screen of trees, some pushed up on earthen berms, frame the entire square-mile park. (Earth berms were first used in Prospect Park in Brooklyn, designed in 1866.)

Architecture was limited to one wood and three stone shelters, three stone bridges, a stone arch which carried foot traffic under Circuit Drive, and several flights of stone-slab steps. This left the Park completely open to the imagination of the visitors; there were no restrictions to the spaces except for the playing field and the acre or two set aside for lawn tennis in Ellicott Dale (which today is a baseball diamond). In no other park was Olmsted able to create a truly country experience as in Franklin Park. Fortunately, this open space is still uncluttered today, especially the lovely broad meadow. By contrast, Prospect Park's magnificent Long Meadow has been broken up with a baseball field fenced off in chainlink, which spoils the meadow completely from the southwest.

Franklin Park was the last urban park that Frederick Law Olmsted designed; he retired in 1895, when the Park was nearly complete. It completes the theories of landscape design first put to practice in Central Park in 1858 and in some ways perfects them, particularly in the careful use of the site for the enjoyment of thousands of people while allowing for solitude for two or three at the same time.

Chapter Two

Patterns of Use in Franklin Park

Franklin Park differed from most of Olmsted's previous parks because it included a 30-acre active playing field, complete with an 800-foot-long boulder platform for viewing games.* Planned - but never built - was another precedent: a Little Folks' Fair, or a tot lot which Olmsted intended to be part of the 70-acre formal entrance, now the Zoo. Two tot lots have been built in 1961 and 1970 on the edges of the Playstead, where they are easily accessible to residential neighborhoods.

Learning from Central Park --where almost from the first day people began putting up statues-- Olmsted planned a space for just this type of commemorative sculpture in the Greeting, the formal entranceway. The Mall in Central Park and the Concert Grove in Prospect Park were Olmsted's earliest responses to this impulse, but Franklin Park had far more space for statuary, concerts and large group activities, and that was exactly the original purpose of the Greeting. A long, broad berm to the south was thickly planted with oaks and beeches to separate the Greeting from the rest of the more passive parkland.

Even while the Park was under construction, public pressure caused the landscape architects to revise their design with the addition of a Pond, placed at the southwest corner of the Park.

Other groups wanted to use the Park for their own purposes, such as labor leaders for an enormous rally in 1890, and a

* Washington Park in Chicago, designed by Olmsted, also has a large space designed for active sports and set apart from the rest of the park.

militia group for a weapons muster; both of these were denied by the Park Commissioners as inappropriate for Franklin Park. Olmsted planned the Playstead specifically for grade school children; he urged that more land be purchased near Franklin Park for active sports for young men. A 100-acre former muster field was purchased in 1894 and named Franklin Field (to relate it to Franklin Park) for this purpose. It was in use by 1898, with ballfields and a bicycle speedway, and was immediately popular.**

The Country Park Meadow became a golf course in 1901.* The meadow was used for golf as early as 1899, when the Park was barely completed. This was the first change in the pattern of use - and intent - in the Park. Golf was - and is - very popular. For 35 years the only public golf course in Boston was in Franklin Park. The Olmsted firm did not like this change at all. In 1910, John Olmsted and Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., the principals of Olmsted Brothers, as the name of the company became after the master's retirement, toured the Park System at the behest of the Park Commissioners. In their report, they criticized the introduction of golf as monopolizing too much parkland for too few people. The same is true today, although, due to poor drainage, only 9 holes are usable. This, fortunately, leaves open a lovely swath of meadowland called Nazingdale, which is a popular playground and picnic area for neighborhood residents.

In 1914, the American Athletic Union began holding track meets in the Country Park Meadow, which indicated a marked shift

** After twenty years of neglect, the restoration of Franklin Field began in 1984 with \$400,000 of improvements.

* Relandscaped as a 9-hole course in 1915; 18 holes in 1922.

in American life to more active pastimes. AAU still holds annual track meets in the fall, bringing runners from schools and colleges all over New England to the Park. The meets use the better part of the golf course every Saturday for two months in the fall. The races begin just east of Ellicott Dale.

At first, Park buildings were used as golf houses beginning with the Schoolmaster Hill Shelter in 1901. In 1924 the basement of the Refectory was converted into a clubhouse.

In 1949, a golf course clubhouse was built on the edge of the meadow near Refectory Hill. A low brick structure on a slab foundation, it was rebuilt after a fire in 1980. The building is a minor intrusion, but it needs trees planted around it to shield it from view from Schoolmaster Hill and Scarborough Hill.

Cross-country events are very popular and attract huge crowds on fall weekends. In an effort to alleviate the conflict between golfer and runner, a new course was laid out in the summer of 1984 with the assistance of The Franklin Park Coalition. The route stays well away from the first five tees and greens and begins east of Ellicott Dale. The Dale is often damp, and the impact of hundreds of runners and spectators was detrimental to the landscape. The new route satisfies all parties.

The only horseback riding in Boston is in Franklin Park on a bridle path built between 1892 and 1895. The path enters over the Forest Hills Entrance, parallels the Circuit Drive and then ducks into the Wilderness at Hagbourne Hill. The path comes out at the Valley Gates, where it parallels the Circuit Drive again, to a turn-around nearly opposite the second tee. There are two stables on the western edge of the Park, and riding is a very

popular activity. The bridle path will be restored and in some places rebuilt in 1986 - 1987.

The first change of use that resulted in a physical change in the Olmsted plan occurred in 1911. After nearly 30 years of discussion over an appropriate site, the Boston Zoological Gardens were begun on the Greeting. Due to the depression of the 1890's and the drain on the Park Department budget for playgrounds in the city, the Music Court, Little Folks' Fair and Deer Park were never realized as Olmsted planned.

Arthur Shurcliff, an apprentice of Olmsted's in his Brookline office in 1896, designed the Zoo. Shurcliff scrupulously respected the Greeting concept by placing all the animal buildings well off to the side of the promenades. A huge entrance gate of composite columns and wrought iron fencing was added in 1917 to the front of the Greeting as a Zoo entrance. This imposing architectural feature greatly added to the formal entranceway. In 1929 two huge marble allegorical statues by Daniel Chester French were removed to the rear of the Zoo grounds. These statues -- representing Science and Labor -- were designed in 1884 and 1885 for the U. S. Post Office and Sub-Treasury Building in the heart of Boston's financial district. That building was razed to make way for the present-day McCormack Building. The statues were set on new pedestals and unveiled to the public for Boston's tercentennial celebration in July 1930.

The Zoo was added to in 1920, 1930, 1932 and 1960, but all in keeping with Shurcliff's original master plan. However, the 1973 master plan for the new Zoo obliterates the Greeting concept altogether. One huge, climatically-controlled dome for African

animals will overlap the walkways. The wonderful 1924 rose garden was bulldozed for this pavilion in 1978. This is an unfortunate loss which, surprisingly enough, was accepted by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service in their 106/Review of the Master Plan and Tropical Forest Pavilion.* All they were concerned with was that the line of sight be preserved; but that was only part of the design rationale for the Greeting.

The next change had the greatest negative effect in the quality of Franklin Park which afflicts the Park to this day: the automobile. The Park Commissioners felt that Franklin Park was underused and introduced the motor vehicle to the Park as a way of increasing use. So, in 1925, Circuit Drive was widened to accommodate motor vehicles and - much worse - crosstown traffic. Sidewalks, road plantings and portions of the original bridle path were swallowed up in the process. When there were no park police or regular police patrolling the Park, motor vehicles could be managed. Crosstown traffic was a different matter: It introduced non-park users, drivers using the Parkway as a throughway. This has become a serious conflict of use and a safety hazard for pedestrians.

With the decrease in numbers of policemen on duty in Franklin Park after World War II, motor vehicles became the biggest menace in the Park. Circuit Drive has no curbing, only cobblestone swales, and the Park had no gates or interior bollards, or barriers,

* Franklin Park - as part of the Olmsted Park System - has been on the National Register since December 1971. Any changes to the System using federal funds must be reviewed by HCRS under the Department of the Interior. Franklin Park was designated a Boston landmark in October 1980 by the Boston Landmarks Commission.

so motorists could drive anywhere they chose over the Park's 500 acres. They used the sidewalks and the footpaths to drive into the woods, hilltops, meadows and around Scarborough Pond. It was not unusual at all to see people washing their cars or changing the oil in their vans on Schoolmaster Hill or on the Playstead Overlook. As a result, erosion of the topsoil, exposing tree roots and forming gullies on hillsides, as well as the dumping of trash, were severe. A lovely stone overlook at Hagbourne Hill in the Wilderness was half destroyed from cars and vans.

Parking lots were rudely carved out of grassy lawns along the edge of the Drive and adjacent to the Golf Course Clubhouse beginning 1960. One lot built in 1966 had asphalt poured around the trees.

Added to this has been the popular use of mopeds, mini-bikes and dirt bikes in the Park - a recent phenomenon of the past decade and another change in recreation which is absolutely inappropriate in urban parks. Young kids race across the golf course and over Scarborough Hill at breakneck speed, causing erosion and deep gullies. Lack of policing and also police that recognize that motorcycles are a problem in the first place have encouraged this park abuse.**

Boston Park Rangers were introduced in Franklin Park in 1984. The Rangers made a difference because dirt bike use dropped dramatically through the summer and for the rest of the year.*

** At one large event during the summer of 1984, a dirt bike raced across the Paystead, skirting the crowds, sometimes driving through them at a reduced speed. The crowd included many children, and a lot of people were sitting on the grass. A half-dozen police officers watched the bike rider without taking any action whatsoever.

* The Rangers are discussed in Chapter Three.

The 1980 Master Plan for Franklin Park, designed by V. Michael Weinmayr and Associates, comes to grips with the motor vehicle problem. The plan called for placing granite blocks along the edge of Circuit Drive, following the contours of the land. The Playstead would have service vehicle access at four points provided by sturdy iron gates. Similar gates have been in use since about 1970 in the vast M.D.C. reservations. The gates are effective and vandal-proof.

The Master Plan recognized that Circuit Drive had been radically altered into a crosstown traffic route and had to be treated accordingly. The Plan called for a handsome earth and masonry bridge at the Valley Gates; vehicles would go under the bridge and the original walks from Schoolmaster Hill and the Playstead would be connected on top. A second bridge of iron was planned to connect the rocky ledges of Hagbourne Hill and Schoolmaster Hill.

The Master Plan boldly addressed the motor vehicle problem without sacrificing the original Olmsted plan or the Park's social use.

Five years after he wrote the Master Plan, Michael Weinmayr reassessed some of its features at a symposium of Harvard Graduate School alumni. He said he would scrap the bridges; they are too expensive and probably would never be built anyway. His solution today would be to close the Circuit Drive on weekends or at night.

Closing the Circuit Drive to all traffic was first done in 1982 with the Kite Festival. It is also done for the West Indian Carnival. The idea of closing Circuit Drive for extended periods of time during peak-use months is slowly becoming more attractive

to the Boston Parks Department. Closing park drives to vehicles during the summer has been common practice in New York's Central Park and Prospect Park in Brooklyn for over a decade.

A year after the Master Plan was produced, the first phase of it was built with a \$400,000 capital improvement project. The project had three parts: restoration of four original landscape features, repaired and rebuilt footways that connected them together and linked one side of the Park with the other, and motor vehicle control.

Motor vehicle control was essential for the preservation of the new walks and to increase park use of the restored park features. The Coalition learned a sad lesson when portions of Loop Road in the Wilderness were paved by the Parks Department in 1974. This only increased motor vehicle abuse. Dumping of rubble and waste, abandoned and burned vehicles, and even two cases of kidnapping and rape in the dark recesses of the woods resulted. Vehicles hit and knocked over half the stones on the Hagbourne Hill Overlook. Without strict motor vehicle controls, no relandscaping was possible.

In 1980, a huge stone railroad causeway was removed for a new transit line through Roxbury and Jamaica Plain. The Coalition was able to get four thousand feet of rectangular granite blocks that formed the wall of the causeway.

For the Phase I improvements, landscape architect Michael Weinmayr used the rectangular shaped granite blocks to create low, irregularly shaped walls that hugged the contours of the land at strategic sections of the Wilderness and Scarborough Pond

to restrict vehicular access. Three iron service gates were built to allow maintenance trucks access to the Wilderness and Nazingdale.

In areas that were very rocky, Weinmayr used an ingenious method of randomly placing large puddingstone boulders. The boulders came from the excavation of the Tropical Forest Pavilion. Motorists had often driven over the slope to Ellicott Dale in the past (indeed, this habit even occurred during construction). A strip of boulders were placed in scattered fashion along the Circuit Drive between Ellicott Arch and Schoolmaster Hill. The slope had many rock outcroppings, and the placed boulders fit in very well.

The Wilderness was now quiet. Scarborough Pond had no vans driving on the narrow path that skirted the Pond shores. Ellicott Dale was not scarred with wheel ruts from cars and vans.

The Scarborough Hill Concourse - a lovely, curving wall of puddingstone built in 1891 - was carefully restored and the eroded drive regraded and paved. And all for pedestrians. It was possible now to walk from the restored Williams Street foot entrance, under Ellicott Arch, and up to the Scarborough Hill Concourse for its great, quiet views of the golf course and Abbottswood. A new walk connected the Concourse with Scarborough Pond.

Vehicles were not entirely controlled, however. The Playstead was still very vulnerable. Refectory Hill was still clogged with cars and vans, the golf course was wide open to vehicles, and Schoolmaster Hill often had vehicles all over it.

The worst area was the Playstead and Glen Road. Abandoned and burned vehicles and dumping of rubble and waste were frequent.

On one day in September 1981, the Parks Department Maintenance Division hauled four five-ton truckloads of rubble and debris from Glen Road. Three rapes occurred in August and September on that secluded park road. In November of 1981, the Park Commissioner closed Glen Road to all traffic at the urging of the Coalition and the Maintenance Division. Blocks of stone were placed at both ends of Glen Road.

In the spring of 1982, the Maintenance Division blocked the Playstead to vehicles. Access was via a locked gate at the Zoo. Although crude, these barriers were effective. Vehicle abuse, dumping and crime stopped. Non-park use declined, and the Park became quieter, cleaner and easier to maintain.

In 1984, Phase II of the Master Plan was built. This phase was planned in 1982 to continue the running block wall around the golf course and Refectory Hill. The Franklin Park Coalition had applied for and received \$150,000 to renovate the Valley Gates. The gates were the entry to the Playstead. It was now possible to relandscape the Gates and solve the vehicular abuse problem concurrently. The new Valley Gates were completed in July 1984. A wall and gates at White Stadium controlled vehicular access at the Sigourney Street Entrance.

The improved Sigourney Street Entrance had the most positive impact. With motor vehicles completely eliminated from the Overlook area, people began to use this part of the Park more and more, particularly the elderly.

By the end of April 1984, a low wall of granite blocks (obtained again from the railroad causeway demolition*) had been

* The Coalition obtained most of this granite from a huge bridge which was (literally) blown up in October 1983. The bridge was part of the railroad causeway at the Forest Hills section

built from Refectory Hill to Schoolmaster Hill, over one-quarter of a mile in length.

These walls suddenly became instant benches: People would sit on them in groups along the golf course or by Refectory Hill. During the Kite Festival, the walls became places to sit and eat or spectator stands for the music programs.

The Franklin Park Coalition hired a contractor over the summer of 1984 to build a low granite wall and reset an iron service gate at Scarborough Hill Drive.** The Phase I improvements did not include this work. A second block wall and pedestrian entrance was also built along Scarborough Pond at the Carriage Bridge; once again, a completion of 1981's Phase I.

The Boston Parks Department had completely closed Franklin Park to motor vehicles except for the Circuit Drive by summer of 1984. The deterioration of Franklin Park had stopped. The management of Franklin Park was now made easier and more predictable.

The final change which altered the character of Franklin Park was not one of use, but of the style of architecture for that use.

Olmsted carefully designed the Playstead as a planned space of active sports and gregarious events.*** A huge, 800-foot-long stone platform called the Overlook, with puddingstone slab seats,

of Boston. The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority assisted in the free transfer of the tens of thousands of feet of granite blocks for Phase I and Phase II improvements.

** Funded by the George B. Henderson Foundation, this was the Coalition's first capital project.

*** For examples, in August of 1913, Boston schoolteachers held an exhibition dancing program in the Playstead; 70 years later, a voter registration drive with DJ's playing the latest music was held there.

was built to view the games. In the center was a broad wooden building. An arch in the stone Overlook connected the playing fields to lockers and bathrooms in the shelter basement. The top story was for picnics, park maintenance storage and, later, a winter home for some of the Zoo's birds. The Shelter and the Overlook were carefully integrated and completed in 1888-1889.

The Shelter burned to the ground in May of 1945. The Parks Department had plans drawn later that year for a low, flat brick building to be constructed on the foundations, but nothing came of that.

Three years later, a huge, 12-acre Schoolboy Stadium was built directly in front of the Overlook and swallowed up half of the Playstead. It was completely incongruous to Olmsted's urban park design concepts as the Wollman Skating Rink in Prospect Park. Yet, the Stadium is in the space designed for active sports. The Stadium replaces the Overlook in function and in style.

The Stadium also quickly eclipsed the Overlook, which suddenly became ignored and avoided. It became badly overgrown, overrun with vehicles on the promenades, and soon completely misunderstood.

Despite an attempt at reuse as a Play House for about six years, the Overlook remained choked with weeds and almost completely overgrown until The Franklin Park Coalition summer work crew cleared and cleaned it over two seasons, 1983 and 1984. Forty years of silt has built up, making most of the seats too low for sitting, and erosion has crumbled portions of the wall. The Overlook is far from being impossible or prohibitive to restore.

The Schoolboy Stadium was turned over to the School Department to manage in September of 1949. Here was the start of multiple managing agencies in Franklin Park. Recently, the School Department and Parks Department have been working more cooperatively and with more intercommunication, so that Park management is more uniform.

The School Department allows use (for a fee, to cover the cost of overtime personnel) for other uses during the summer months. The Suffolk County Agricultural Fair was held there in 1978. Every Sunday since 1983, the Mattapan Soccer League, a Haitian group, plays their marathon games. In August, the West Indian community holds their calypso, steel band and children's masquerade competitions.

Traffic and parking is a problem with the Stadium, but proper planning has improved that situation. There is a large, one-acre parking lot adjacent to the east side of the Stadium. School Department staff direct vehicles through the new Sigourney Street Entrance service gates to the lot to make certain that motorists don't stray off into Long Crouch Woods nearby or across the ballfields.

In 1984, the Stadium became for the first time more integrated into the Park as a whole, because of cooperation and communication of mutual understanding between two city agencies: the Parks Department and the School Department.

To indicate the huge size of the Playstead, in July 1984, while hundreds of spectators watched a soccer game in the Stadium a thousand people partied on the Playstead fields just outside to the music of reggae and calypso during the annual Trinidad-Barbados Jamboree. And one didn't even notice the other.

Soccer on The Playstead. Opened in June of 1889, The Playstead was the first section of the Park begun in July of 1885. The Overlook is in the background.



The Overlook. Designed to view the games on The Playstead. The Overlook is an 800-foot-long boulder platform for viewing and promenading. It was cleared of overgrowth by The Coalition work crew in 1983 and 1984.



Cross-country meet, October 1984. In 1914, the American Athletic Union was given permission to use Franklin Park for cross-country competitions. The course is best in the region and attracts thousands every weekend of the fall.

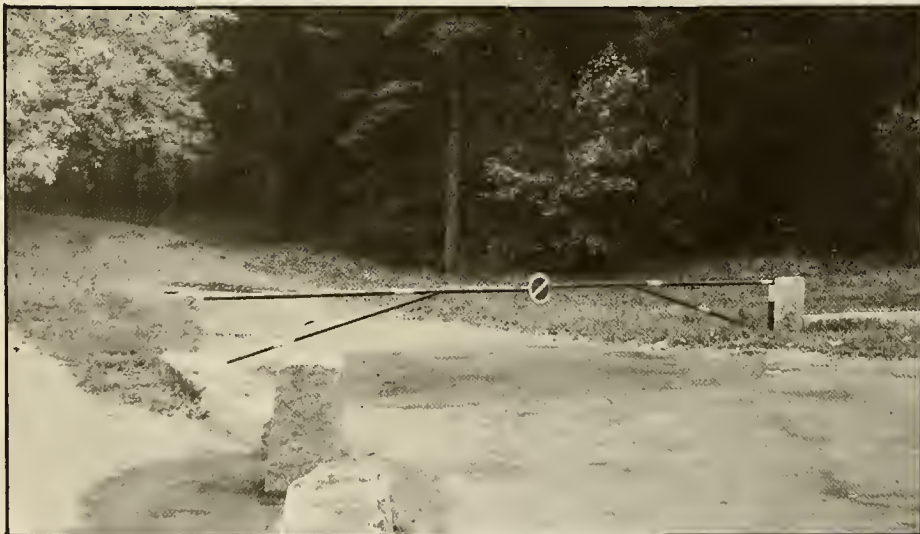




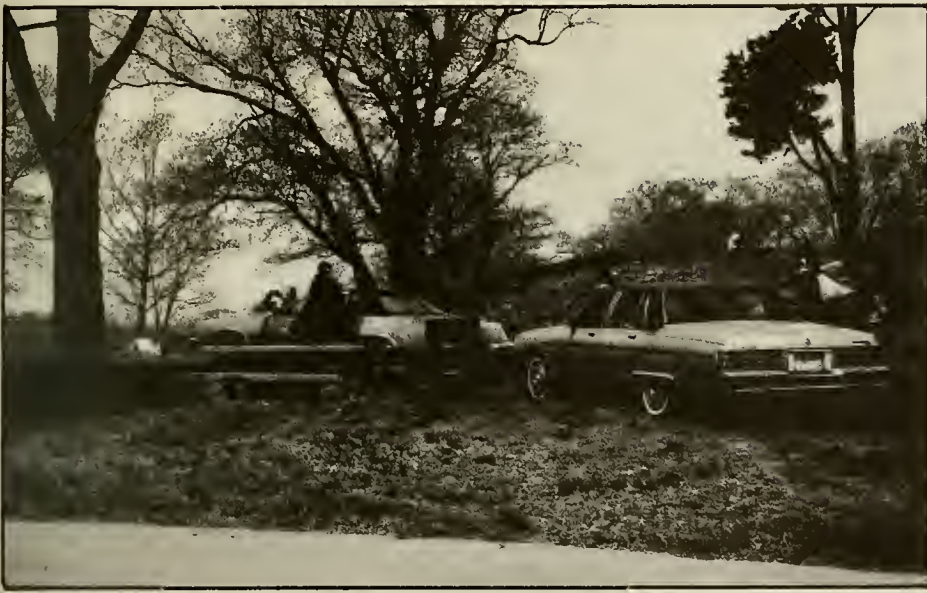
Gently curving cobblestone swales, built in 1924, when Circuit Drive was widened to accommodate motor vehicles, do not prevent vehicles from driving into the parkland.



In 1981, the first capital improvement project solved that problem with random puddingstone boulders, placed in an irregular line that prevented vehicles from driving off Circuit Drive.



Service gate and running block wall at Scarborough Hill Drive near the tennis courts. Built in the summer of 1984 by The Franklin Park Coalition's contractor.



Illegal parking on Schoolmaster Hill, May 1980. Careless drivers once caused serious erosion and soil compaction problems to the grounds of Franklin Park.



Service gate and pedestrian entrance to Schoolmaster Hill, October 1984. This work, completed in the summer of 1984, eliminated motor vehicle access to Schoolmaster Hill. Note the running block walls on both sides of The Circuit Drive which strictly confine motorists.



A low wall of rough-cut granite blocks was placed from Refectory Hill to Schoolmaster Hill between November and December 1983 by the Boston Parks Department contractor. Designed to keep motor vehicles off the greens of the Golf Course, this woman discovered a secondary use. The stones are also popular as benches.



The Valley Gates, September 19

The Valley Gates restored, September 1984. The Gates segregate the active from the passive parks within Franklin Park. The road curving off to the left is Glen Road.



Information panels at the Valley Gates were part of the restoration project. The panels describe the two-park concept and the general plan of Franklin Park.





The Franklin Park Community.

The earliest homes were single-family ones. This masterpiece at 250 Seaver Street was designed in 1912 by James T. Ball. The gambrel roofed house next door was built in 1908. The first apartment block was built in 1909, and this became the dominant style of living around the Park.



The gate to Franklin Park. Completed in 1917. This entrance faces the Franklin Park Zoo and looks out onto Blue Hill Avenue.



The Franklin Park Coalition work crew cleans the Hagbourne Hill steps. Spring school vacation, April 1984.

The work crew cleans the walk along The Overlook, August 1984.



Boston Park Rangers walk along the Golf Course.

Chapter Three

The Management of Franklin Park

Frederick Law Olmsted did far more than design parks in his extraordinary career. He superintended the construction of his designs for at least three large urban parks* (as well as the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago and the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina between 1890 and 1895). Olmsted also managed one park, Central Park, between 1872 and 1878. Indeed, his experience with Central Park was very thorough: designer, architect-in-chief and general superintendent. With this experience, he developed practical theories of park design and park management, which he reiterated and revised over his nearly forty years of active practice.

Frederick Law Olmsted understood clearly that he was a pioneer in a new aspect of American life which he frequently had to justify. In order for his designs to have any meaning for urban life, he had to formulate and over the years repeat two main themes - maintenance and policing of the new parks.

As the landscape architect, he considered maintenance by using local materials - often dug up on site - for the architecture of his parks. Olmsted always insisted on quality work in construction which he could command when they supervised construction. In Franklin Park, Olmsted and his step-son John were involved in design and construction for a dozen years, longer than any other park the firm created.

* Central Park and Brooklyn's Prospect Park were designed with his partner, Calvert Vaux. Vaux supervised the construction of Morningside Park, on which they also collaborated.

Local plant material was also used, although Olmsted and his landscape gardener, William Fischer, used much variety in planting Franklin Park. Olmsted wanted Franklin Park's trees and shrubs to have color and interest all year long. His urban parks were rural in character and did not demand the care of skilled workers such as the Public Garden would require. After Central Park - the southern half of which has a profusion of architecture - Olmsted kept architecture to a minimum, much of which was made of local materials carefully built.

In Franklin Park, only the Forest Hills Entrance Bridge and the Scarborough Pond Carriage Bridge were made of building materials from outside of Boston. This was Cape Ann granite. It was used because every other bridge on the main parkways from the Fens to Franklin Park is of the same stone. Every building,* all three terraces, the stone steps, Ellicott Arch, and the Pond footbridge were all built of puddingstone dug up from the Schoolmaster Hill quarry.

As the landscape architect of Franklin Park, Olmsted considered management by carefully designing access points, segregating them for wheeled vehicles and pedestrians.

The Forest Hills Street, Morton Street and American Legion Highway boundaries of Franklin Park have only one entrance apiece. Forest Hills Street has only one pedestrian entrance. These boundary roads alone surround about 300 acres. On the other hand, the forty-acre Playstead has five entrances, all of them mixed vehicular and pedestrian.

* Except the Refectory, which was made of yellow Roman brick and terra cotta. John Olmsted hated it.

The reason for this was park use. Olmsted intended that the approximately 300-acre Country Park (as he called it in the 1885 plan) was to be a quiet, restful and passive space. Access to Scarborough Pond, Scarborough Hill and the Wilderness was easy once visitors used the two main entrances at Forest Hills and Blue Hill Avenue. The Wilderness had the complex Loop Road for carriages, but entered only from the main Circuit Drive.

The Playstead was for active use, for sports, pageants and mass gatherings. Its entrances faced main roads and heavily used transit lines.

The Playstead was built for crowds, and people could easily and quickly get in and out.. The Playstead was also set off on the north corner of the Park, which made access simpler and ensured the quiet of the Country Park.

Adjoining the Playstead was the quarter-mile long Greeting, designed after London's Rotten Row in Hyde Park. This promenade was the main entrance, grander than any other Olmsted park. The Greeting began directly at Blue Hill Avenue, the Park's primary axis and one of Boston's major boulevards and thoroughways since colonial times. (By the First World War, Blue Hill Avenue was the bustling center of the largest Jewish community outside of New York City,)

The Greeting became the Franklin Park Zoo in 1911. The landscape architect of the Zoo, Arthur Shurcliff, carefully preserved the Greeting's design by setting the animal and bird houses well back from the promenades.*

* The Greeting, in fact, was never built as Olmsted intended until the Zoo was begun. The first superintendent of the Boston Parks Department changed the design to a long, grassy "glade", as he called it. The promenade walks were completed in 1919.

Olmsted also designed two types of road systems in Franklin Park which he and Calvert Vaux first devised for Central Park in 1858: a business, or non-park use, road and a park drive.

An existing street, Glen Road, was extended through the Park, connecting Jamaica Plain center and its railroad depot to Blue Hill Avenue. This park road was segregated from the Wilderness and the Playstead by stone walls and high earth berms well planted to screen out the traffic. Glen Road bisected the Valley Gates, the neck that was the entrance from Country Park to the Playstead, and served as a demarcation line between the two types of uses Olmsted had created for Franklin Park - the active and formal from the passive and natural.

Franklin Park is a square with a circle in it. That circle is the Circuit Drive, around which one can walk or drive to every major topographic and landscape feature in Franklin Park. Connected to main city roads by the two arms of the Forest Hills and Blue Hill Avenue entrances, the Circuit Drive makes Franklin Park the most well organized of any Olmsted Park.

Olmsted insisted that all his parks be closed at night. Not one park is today. Franklin Park never was, but not because of a lack of planning.

The original design of Franklin Park included three large stone gates that shut the Country Park: at the Forest Hills entrance on the bridge, at the Blue Hill Avenue entrance at the corner of Glen Lane, and the Valley Gates. These were completed but never used, and the Parks Department tore them down in 1901. Only the stone gatehouses at the Valley Gates remain today.*

* Restored in 1984 by the Boston Parks Department. The wooden seats inside were replaced by The Franklin Park Coalition in November of 1984.

Two new pedestrian entrances have been built since the Olmsted firm ceased supervising Franklin Park in 1895: the Wales Street Entrance, a foot entrance built in 1908 at the corner of Blue Hill Avenue and American Legion Highway, and the Long Crouch Wood Entrance and steps, built in 1906. The Wales Street Entrance leads to a stone drinking fountain with rings of benches and a pretty view of the Country Park Meadow. The Long Crouch Woods Entrance, at the corner of Walnut Avenue and Seaver Street, had walks built to the Greeting and the Playstead.

In 1910, John Olmsted wrote to the Boston Park Commissioners,

At the time the park was laid out, automobiles had not been developed. They are so objectionable in a great popular park that they have not yet been allowed in Franklin Park nor the Arboretum. They are so much used for pleasure that it seems advisable to admit them to Franklin Park with reasonable restrictions. They might be gradually or experimentally admitted by a system of special licenses.*

The automobile drastically changed and, over the course of time, badly damaged Franklin Park. The automobile changed the Sunday promenade to the Sunday Drive, and in response to this, the Parks Department opened Franklin Park to motor vehicles in 1924.** To accommodate them, the main stretch of Circuit Drive between the Forest Hills Entrance and Blue Hill Avenue was widened and several curves straightened. Work began in mid

* Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Department of Parks, 1911. Prospect Park did have special automobile permits for use of that park by motorists.

** The Arboretum has never permitted motor vehicles except by special permit for the elderly, handicapped or other special need. Huge iron gates close the Arboretum to all but pedestrians. The same style gates were built for Franklin Park, too.

December 1924, and was completed in August 1925. Cars began using the new drive in late 1925.

Circuit Drive quickly became a throughway, from Columbia Road and Blue Hill Avenue to the Arborway, Hyde Park Avenue and Center Street to the west. Glen Road became superfluous.

John Olmsted, in his 1910 report, urged more police to enforce park regulations and safeguard the public once motor vehicles were allowed in the Park. For some years, the Overlook Shelter was a police substation. Once that building burned in May of 1945, Franklin Park lost its police force.

Internal park traffic increased to an alarming proportion with the opening of White Stadium in September of 1949. The May 25, 1950 Jamaica Plain Citizen reported:

Recent completion of the Schoolboy Stadium, bringing thousands of more automobiles to Franklin Park during the football season and to special track and field events, has increased to a considerable extent the number of violators to the "motor vehicles excluded" signs which ban motorists from a large segment of the Park.

The next month, City Councillor Philip Tracy demanded that the city close Franklin Park to motor vehicles completely. He said at a hearing:

The opening of the road around the Playstead to auto traffic...has made a raceway out of what was once a haven for young children and has deprived residents of the district of their Park.

Councillor Tracy's words went unheeded, and the situation worsened. Twenty years after Councillor Tracy's proposal, The Franklin Park Coalition prevailed on the Parks Department to block off Franklin Park to motor vehicles.

By the late 1960's, motor vehicles brought in crime. Drugs, prostitution, stolen goods and stolen vehicles were taking over the Park. Ian Menzies, writing in the Boston Globe of June 8, 1972, declared, "It was the automobile which ruined and ravaged Franklin Park as it has ruined and ravaged much of urban life." The miles of winding roads and the numerous entrances to the Playstead invited this type of activity. By 1969, the Playstead was practically shunned. The Boston Police Department, intimidated and bewildered by recent demonstrations and street riots in Boston's black community, which by then had replaced the white Jewish and Irish neighborhoods around the Park, publicly declared a "hands-off policy." No laws were enforced in Franklin Park. Franklin Park was a free-for-all.

The community refused to accept that easy out. The Coalition was formed by residents of the black community to stop the deterioration of Franklin Park. The Coalition immediately demanded that vehicles be excluded from Franklin Park and that the Police Department crack down on crime there. A big, concerted police push in the summers of 1971 and 1972 eradicated much of the crime. The Parks Department blocked off all the old carriage entrances to Franklin Park, but stopped in 1972 and left the work incomplete.

The Coalition persisted. In 1981, Glen Road had been permanently closed to vehicles. Finally, in 1981 and 1984, the Parks Department spent over \$200,000 to block off all the interior spaces of Franklin Park to motor vehicles.

The situation had vastly improved in 1984. The landscape of Franklin Park no longer suffered the ravages of cars, trucks

and vans. The stigma of Franklin Park as a place of unchecked abuse and vandalism is wearing off as more and more people use the Park, taking back Franklin Park from the scourge of the motor vehicle.

II.

A careful design is meaningless without regular maintenance of the built park. Olmsted often wrote of his parks that they would quickly become a blight on the abutting neighborhoods without adequate maintenance of the grounds.

Although the City of Boston spent nearly 5 million dollars to buy the land and create Franklin Park (including the Franklin Park Zoo), maintenance allocations were never sufficient. As early as 1910, the Park Commissioner wrote of his concern for an adequate budget. When more and more playgrounds were built throughout the city in the 'teens and 'twenties, the strain on the Park maintenance budget was even worse as sports competed with woodlands and fields.

The first aspect of Franklin Park to be neglected were the trees. The Wilderness, Long Crouch Woods and Scarborough Hill (the three largest woodlands in Franklin Park) haven't had systematic tree care, pruning, thinning, replanting and woods mowing, since the 1920's. Today huge, magnificent hemlocks, beeches, sugar maples and white oaks stand amidst overcrowded secondary growth, dead limbs, weeds and vines. Most of the forest floors are nearly impassable. The insidious Japanese knotweed has taken hold and choked enormous areas such as the Overlook due to lack of mowing. The large stands of eastern red cedars and junipers that so characterized the western end of the Wilderness, the Valley Gates and Schoolmaster Hill are today gone by disease, air pollution, old age, or overcrowding. The Zoo lost its great promenade of English elms to the 1960's blight.

The absence of any regular maintenance of Franklin Park was the second problem addressed by the newly formed Franklin Park Coalition to the Boston Parks Department. The Coalition responded by sponsoring dozens of volunteer cleanups over the years.

In January 1981, the Parks Department budget was slashed 60% to about \$5.4 million due the Proposition 2½. The situation was very, very bleak. By that time, The Coalition had received its tax-exempt status and had a full-time director. At a meeting with Park Commissioner John Vitagliano in February of 1981, The Coalition director proposed a work crew for Franklin Park if the Department could lend the Coalition the tools. The Commissioner agreed.

The first Franklin Park Coalition work crew lasted for just under eight weeks in the summer of 1981. The first crew was assigned by the anti-poverty program, Action for Boston Community Development. Fourteen teenagers, under The Coalition director's supervision, regularly and systematically cleaned Franklin Park for the first time in many years.

Without a truck, it was impossible to do all of the Park, so heavy-use areas such as the entrances to the Playstead, the Picnic Grove near the tennis courts, Schoolmaster Hill, the Valley Gates and Glen Road (which was at that time still open to traffic) were cleaned and cut back of weeds and tall grass. The Humboldt Avenue Entrance had never been cleaned, and it took over three hours to bag the rubbish.

The Coalition's summer work crew is now a regularly established project in Franklin Park. The first summer was difficult,

but it educated The Coalition on how to supervise unskilled teenagers, how to rotate from one section of the Park to the next, and how to accomplish the most with handtools and no motorized equipment.

The second summer, under Park Commissioner Robert McCoy, The Coalition worked with a direct contract from the Parks Department for a supervisor's fee and a loaned Parks Department truck. In 1982, The Coalition bought its own tools, equipment and trash bags. Also in that year, The Coalition interviewed and hired the work crew itself. The Coalition went to social service agencies around Franklin Park and to one high school for referrals. Twelve young men and women were hired for the 1982 season.

The truck gave The Coalition far more mobility and flexibility, and great deal of maintenance was accomplished. Large scale clearing of secondary growth, thick vines and overgrowth was begun for the first time that year. The top of Ellicott Arch was completely opened up, for example.

A pattern was establishing itself: The Coalition had divided Franklin Park into sixteen sections based on Park use, maintenance needs, and a third category of opening up sections to more use. A maintenance guide was drawn up in September of 1982, based on the two years' experience of regular park cleanup and general clearing and pruning.

For its part, the Parks Department picked up all the brush and rubbish collected by The Coalition work crew and continued its work of mowing the golf course, the baseball diamonds and other large areas. In 1982, The Coalition work crew began to be

integrated more into the Parks Department Maintenance Division routine.

In 1982, the Boston Parks Department received a \$536,000 grant from the U. S. Department of the Interior, Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery Program.

This unique venture, devised by the Parks Department in an effort to come to grips with its inadequate budget, was a two-year program called the Boston Partners in Urban Recreation. Community groups were asked for proposals over the winter of 1983. The groups were required to raise 30% of the costs the first year and 50% the second year of their program. In all, the Park Commissioner awarded 33 contracts in 1983.

The Franklin Park Coalition had raised \$12,000 for its summer work crew in 1982, and nearly \$14,000 for the 1983 season. It was then well above the 30% match-up for its contract of \$7,000 in the 1983 season.

That \$7,000 contract did wonders for Franklin Park.

After a bidding contest, the Southwest Corridor Farm was selected in May of 1983 to do lawn mowing, overgrowth removal and selected tree work.

The Wales Street Entrance and Elm Avenue Entrance - long clogged with weeds and tall grass - were completely opened up. The Wales Street Entrance and the adjacent fountain and seats were literally resurrected from galloping weeds by the Farm contractor. The contractor also began the first part of the massive general clearing of the Overlook in August of 1983. This project was completed the following season, probably the largest transformation of any portion of Franklin Park.

Areas such as the Elm Hill Avenue entrance and Wales Street, which had never been mowed in years, have been regularly cut for two seasons. It now takes about an hour to mow Elm Hill Avenue entrance; in 1983 it took all morning the first time and two other mowings to get the grass completely trimmed. Other areas such as the Williams Street entrance and Scarborough Hill Concourse, both of which were relandscaped in 1981 by the Parks Department, were kept looking beautiful by mowing. The trees at the Concourse were carefully pruned by the Farm in 1984.

Systematic removal of dead trees, the pruning of others, and - more importantly - teaching The Coalition about the use of pole saws and how to prune, made large sections of the Park's trees look much better. The contractor was also able to help remove many fallen limbs after a huge early spring snowstorm on March 29, 1984.

The Coalition and the Southwest Corridor Farm will begin their third season of work together on Franklin Park. The two-year program during which The Coalition received \$12,000, has ended and The Coalition has included the contractor's work as part of its annual fundraising for the summer work crew.

In 1984, The Coalition had a \$7,500 contract with the Boston Parks Department for the summer work crew (that is, in addition to the Boston Partners grant). The Coalition rented its own half-ton pickup truck, bought its own tools and equipment, and hired 14 teenagers from the neighborhoods around the Park. The total work crew budget for 1984 was \$24,000. The contract with the Southwest Corridor Farm was for \$7,000, bringing the total to \$31,000 of maintenance provided to Franklin

Park by The Franklin Park Coalition.

In 1983, The Coalition began to work during the week of April school vacation, hiring back the old crew from the previous year. This was continued in 1984. A big jump on summer maintenance - particularly in cleaning the three long flights of stone steps and all the Entrances - is achieved that way. In 1984, a total of 25 more working days in spring and fall were put in by hiring a partial crew for Saturday work. Glen Road was cleared of secondary growth and the remaining trees pruned up during October and November, using a partial work crew on funds left over from the 1984 work crew wages account.

No park can exist or thrive without regular, systematic and planned maintenance of its grounds and trees. Vandalism drops, use increases, and the public's attitudes become more optimistic all at once. This has all been seen in Franklin Park.

III.

Olmsted constantly and strongly emphasized the necessity of park police. As Superintendent of Central Park, Olmsted drew up the first park regulations and formed and trained park guides and police. On July 17, 1873, he wrote a report to the Park Commissioners explaining the necessity of a park police force:

It is with reference to the prevention of ignorant and inconsiderate misuse of the Park that the keeper's force chiefly needs to be organized, instructed, trained and disciplined. If it is sufficient for the part required of it, in the design of the Park...it will be sufficient for protection against crime...the danger of misuse of the Park for criminal ends is a much more definite and obvious one.

On August 20, 1886, the Park Commissioners of Boston adopted the first Park Ordinances. Violations of any aspect of the nine rules were punishable by a fine of \$20. Some of them are quite similar to today's regulations: no fires, intoxicating beverages or games of chance were allowed; others are rooted in their time, like the rule which forbids anyone "to solicit the acquaintance of other visitors."

The Park Regulations were last amended by the Board of Park Commissioners on August 1, 1969 to control motor vehicle abuse: All motorized vehicles are prohibited from all parks and park sidewalks.

In 1984, again to address the needs of different park usage, The Coalition drew up a Guidelines for Holding Events in Franklin Park. Based on years of observation, experience

and holding the 1982 Kite Festival, The Coalition wrote specific instructions for traffic and parking, vendor placement, radio station and other entertainment and crowd control. This draft was revised by the Parks Department, approved by the Board of Commissioners, and used for the first time with success in the summer of 1984. The printed booklet indicated to all organizers of events that the Parks Department was being equitable in its managing of events. The Coalition was hired to monitor all events and enforce the guidelines.

A second set of guidelines was written by The Coalition and approved by the Parks Department for the large track meets that take place every fall. Track events during the 1984 season showed that these guidelines had to be rewritten to be more specific.

As early as 1860, Frederick Law Olmsted wrote about the necessity of park keepers for the new Central Park. In this letter to the Park Board, he discussed the number of keepers necessary and where they should be stationed, and advised strongly for a mounted patrol.

As the General Superintendent of Central Park in 1873, Olmsted drew up the first Organization and Routine of Duty of the Keepers Service of Central Park. Rules of Conduct of the Keepers, as well as Park Ordinances, were also drawn up and adopted by the New York Park Commissioners.

In 1979, the New York Park Department reinstituted the Park Keepers, this time calling them Park Rangers. The immediate success of the New York Rangers became the inspiration for Boston's own Park Rangers in 1983.

Twenty Park Rangers were inaugurated on May 17, 1983 for duty in the Arnold Arboretum, Boston Common and the Public Garden. Over \$28,000 for the first year's program was raised by the public.

The second year, the program was expanded to include Franklin Park, the Back Bay Fens and Jamaica Park. Forty-six Rangers were sworn in by Mayor Ray Flynn in Franklin Park on May 24, 1984. As in the previous year, public subscription played an important part in raising the necessary \$300,000 for the Rangers; in all, \$33,000 was raised in sums of \$10 to \$15,000.

Ten Rangers were assigned to Franklin Park, five each on foot and mounted units. The foot Rangers worked five on, two off shifts from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The mounted Rangers worked four ten-hour days with three off. All ten Rangers worked weekends for the peak-use periods of Franklin Park, especially during large events.

The Rangers had no official police powers, particularly the power of arrest. They did have two-way radios, which the police closely monitored. Relations with the Boston Police Department were strengthened over the first year. Franklin Park's Rangers issued verbal warnings, helped victims of crimes (three), and assisted Park users in a variety of ways from giving directions to teaching Park history.

Interpretive programs were the most popular and the most commented upon by the public. There were walking tours of Franklin Park and the popular "Horse, of Course" program for

youngsters and adults. A Ranger Day in August was a family Sunday, during which the community around the Park were invited to meet the Rangers and join the entertainment and games.

Franklin Park users were unfamiliar for over ten years with any regular policing of their Park. Uniformed Rangers charged with helping the public were a great psychological tonic for the Franklin Park communities.

A byproduct of both the Park Ranger Program and the Boston Partners Grants was the formation of community-based advisory boards. Each park which had Rangers was represented by an organization with a long history of involvement in that park.

The Partners Advisory Board was made up of representatives of each recipient agency or organization which met about quarterly. The Partners Advisory Board formed the nucleus of a real park constituency group that only time will tell can continue.

The Partners group was diverse and people met people they normally would not have had an opportunity to otherwise: playgrounds, recreation centers, gardeners, and park people from every corner of the city.

In 1873, Frederick Law Olmsted wrote:

The Park Commissioners are trustees and managers for the whole body of owners of a large amount of public property...whatever value the owners are to enjoy for [the great sum of money] they have laid out upon the park will depend upon the prevention of misuse, which again is a question of the efficiency of park keeping...the business of the Commissioners.

There have been formed throughout the country, since about 1970, citizens groups formed to improve their parks. These Park Protectors are the owners taking a more active role in

park management.

The Franklin Park Coalition was one of those Park Protectors, formed in 1971. At this writing, it has contracts with the Parks Department for maintenance and for managing events.

The formation of the Boston Partners group is a new network of park users and constituents that, hopefully, will form a larger coalition to return civic pride to Boston's parks. Most groups are not as sophisticated or full-time as the Coalition is; in Boston the Coalition is unusual.

The Park Protectors are the newest and most important level of park management. Olmsted put great emphasis on educating the people about their parks. A democracy, he felt, demands a certain amount of responsibility from its citizens in order to function.

IV.

After almost a generation of mismanagement, followed by outright neglect of Franklin Park, the Boston Parks Department and The Franklin Park Coalition are learning all over again how to manage Franklin Park. The Coalition performs the function as the eyes and ears of the Department, bringing to it problems of use or abuse, and recommends solutions to these based on observation, experience, and an intuitive knowledge of the surrounding communities.

As in the late 1890's, when the public first started to use Franklin Park and discover what Olmsted and the Parks Department had designed and built, the public today is rediscovering this great park. Use is growing every year, slowly but steadily, based on a concomitant growth in maintenance and improvement.

Years of neglect encouraged careless use and abuse of Franklin Park, which is slowly eroding away by careful management, prompt maintenance, and a steady dialogue between park users and the Parks Department through The Coalition.

The Coalition and the Boston Parks Department will continue this progress only if the open communication levels and mutual respect continue and flourish as they have since 1981.

As Park Commissioner Robert McCoy said at a public gathering of park advocates in January 1985: Franklin Park cannot be managed alone - either by the Parks Department or The Coalition - but together.

Chapter Four

The Population Relationship of Franklin Park to Boston

I.

Like Central Park in Manhattan and Olmsted's South Park in Chicago, Franklin Park's site was in an as yet undeveloped portion of the city; indeed, all of the area had only been part of the City of Boston for 15 years when the park land was purchased by 1883.

The development of the West Roxbury Highlands into Franklin Park coincided with the residential development of the land around the Park. This was spurred on by the electrification of the streetcars in 1889, which rapidly replaced the plodding horsecars as the 1890's drew to a close.

The first part of the Franklin Park area to be built up was influenced by the Park itself. Beginning in 1886, George Bond began dividing up his property into streets and house lots. Some of his land became The Steading in Franklin Park (the rocky woods between Sigourney Street and the Overlook). In 1888, Sigourney Street was laid out through Bond's property from Walnut Avenue (which ended then at what is today Peter Parley Road; the rest of it became Pierpont Road along the Overlook in Franklin Park). Robeson Street and Peter Parley Road were laid out to Forest Hills Street and fine, single-family homes began being built on ample lots in the prevailing Queen Anne shingle style of residential architecture. By 1890, six houses between Robeson and Glen Road had been built, as well as half of Robeson Street. The big house at the corner of Glen Road

and Sigourney Street (on the Park side) was completed in October of 1890, for example.

This neighborhood was a few blocks away from the Jamaica Plain station of the Old Colony Railroad, which encouraged the development of Bond's land.

The School Street neighborhood is much older; the 1874 Atlas of Boston shows it to be thoroughly built up, undoubtedly because it was near Washington Street, a factory and business district. The character of this neighborhood is unchanged today.

In 1844 or 1845, Lucius M. Sargent built a one-and-a-half story wood frame house on Seaver Street. The house still remains. He owned land that later became Long Crouch Woods and portions of the Zoo.

The Seaver Street boundary formed a unique suburban community at the edge of Roxbury Highlands. This was largely due to its steepness, but also because Franklin Park prevented Walnut Avenue and Humboldt Avenue from becoming heavily traveled crosstown roads. In 1895, after Seaver Street had been rebuilt, the big estates between Fountain Square (Horatio Harris Park, an Olmsted design of 1913) to Seaver Street began being broken up into house lots and streets, the way it is seen today.

Construction proceeded from the edge of the Highlands to the middle of Roxbury. The bigger houses for more well-to-do families were built closest to Franklin Park, single and double family houses in the latest architectural style (mostly Colonial Revival). One great white house with massive Corinthian columns was built in 1912, for example, opposite the Antelope Range at the Zoo. The development of the single-family house lasted

only until about 1905, when the Jewish population started to increase. In 1909, a curved front, brick apartment block was erected at the corner of Seaver and Blue Hill Avenue. By the First World War, the Jewish population was the largest outside of New York City. Several large synagogues were built, Adath Jesurum on Blue Hill Avenue at Intervale Street, consecrated in December 1906, had the largest Jewish congregation in New England. The dignified Temple Mishkan Tefila was built in 1924 opposite the Elm Hill Avenue entrance.

A huge apartment house boom of 1925 to 1929 created the thick warrens of apartment blocks on Elm Hill Avenue east to Blue Hill Avenue and on Seaver Street.

The distinctive brick corner block at 600 Blue Hill Avenue, opposite the entrance to the Park, was built in 1908. The storefronts were added in 1925. Another distinctive landmark apartment block was built by Jewish developers in 1928 at 140 Seaver Street. This is a handsome brick and block with white pillars on the top porches and overlooks the Humboldt Avenue entrance.

Blue Hill Avenue was widened in 1898 for a streetcar line down its center. Franklin Park lost about thirty feet for this line. A streetcar station was built in 1913 opposite the present-day Charles Drew Health Center. Two years later, Seaver Street was rebuilt again for a streetcar line out of Eggleston Station. The reservation was built out of Franklin Park land, and a turnaround was built at the Humboldt Avenue entrance.* Walks were built from the turnaround to the Bear Den and to the Winter Bird House.

* In 1955 this turnaround was rebuilt for trackless trolleys,

Blue Hill Avenue opposite the Park became commercialized about the time the Franklin Park Theater was built in 1914. Storefronts were built on wings added on either side of the Theater, and up and down the Avenue heretofore residential blocks had ground-floor storefronts added on by Jewish developers. Undoubtedly, the new Franklin Park Zoo encouraged this change in development.

Some fine single-family houses were built on Forest Hills Street in the 1890's. A flood of triple-deckers were built on the street in the mid- to late-20's, substantially changing that quiet street of fine residential houses built in the shingle style.*

The Great Depression stopped all building, but by then most of the land, except some large lots in the 200 block of Forest Hills Street, had been built up. One six-family house was built in the late 1930's. The rest of Forest Hills Street was built up with thickly settled apartment complexes in the mid- to late-1960's.**

Franklin Park and its community, then, developed together.

and soon after for buses. The discontinued streetcar reservation was turned into the eastbound lane of Seaver Street. The MBTA abandoned the turnaround in 1982, and in 1986 will relandscape it as an entrance to Franklin Park once more.

* In 1954, the street was doubled in width and, in parts, straightened, again taking up to 25 feet of parkland to do so.

** The writer is indebted to Sam Bass Warner's Streetcar Suburbs and to the Boston Landmarks Commission's 1982 Roxbury Preservation Survey for much of this information.

II.

For sixty years, Boston's large, prosperous and politically active Jewish community lived in the greater Franklin Park community from Grove Hall to Mattapan, Elm Hill to Wellington Hill. Synagogues, Hebrew schools, kosher meat markets and Jewish theaters characterized this community. Franklin Park served that community and the community and the Park became identified with one another.

A change could be seen in the 1950's: Jews moving out, to West Roxbury, to Brookline, to Framingham, to their own homes - out of the apartments and away from what for some were bitter Depression memories.

Boston's black community, although centered in the Massachusetts Avenue/Columbus Avenue axis for most of the century, also shared the Washington Park community with Jews and Irish-Americans. West Indians moving to Boston during the First World War settled in new homes built on Homestead, Hutchings and Monroe Streets. This black community was a distinct minority, though.

When in 1964 the Boston Redevelopment Authority autocratically condemned much of Boston's "Harlem" of Lenox, Northampton and Shawmut Avenues, these families moved into neighborhoods near Franklin Park recently vacated by Jews.

By the end of the 1960's, Roxbury and North Dorchester were almost exclusively black communities. A nearly complete demographic shift had taken place in twenty years.

This came as a tremendous shock to Bostonians. The white middle class and Jewish communities which surrounded the Park on three sides had been the first groups to settle around Franklin Park. Within a short period of time, poor Southern blacks had replaced this familiar, long-standing community. The upheavals of Washington Park Urban Renewal Project* and the civil rights demonstrations brought consternation and fear to white residents around Franklin Park. The riots along Blue Hill Avenue following Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968, drove out many whites, and those that remained shunned Franklin Park.

Franklin Park was perceived to be black turf, and white residents' fears and misunderstandings of the new black residents led many to feel that Franklin Park was lost - worthless to anyone but "them".

The arrival of many blacks to the area coincided with an alarming decline of maintenance and lack of policing of Franklin Park. Many people blamed the blacks for this decline. Whites were bitter and angry at what had happened to a park they had many fond memories of. The police kept a deliberate "hands-off" policy towards Franklin Park for fear of instigating another "race riot".

Ironically, the same people blamed for Franklin Park's deterioration were the ones to begin to bring it back. In 1969, Elma Lewis, founder and director of the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts, began a concerted effort to stop the decline of

* This project leveled nearly 500 acres in the center of Roxbury for new and often subsidized housing blocks.

Franklin Park. Miss Lewis has lived for most of her life on Homestead Street, two blocks from Long Crouch Woods, and her School moved into the former Mishkan Tefila Synagogue on Elm Hill Avenue and Seaver Street, across from the Zoo, in 1968.

Under the aegis of the Elma Lewis School of Fine Arts, a lobbying effort on behalf of Franklin Park was begun. Elma Lewis firmly believed that the future of Franklin Park belonged to the owners of the Park - city residents whose taxes pay for its upkeep. The Franklin Park Coalition was created as a result.

Franklin Park is judged today not by how it is used but who uses it. It is common to hear today by even the most fair minded people that Franklin Park is not used or it is underused. The people who say this are inevitably white, and what they mean is that it is unused by whites. In 1980, one senior editor of a major Boston newspaper told this writer that Franklin Park would be improved when more whites used it.

Bostonians are irrationally preoccupied with color. In May of 1984, a Boston newspaper columnist wrote that Mayor Flynn should lead a white delegation to Franklin Park as one way of achieving racial harmony. Later, a city official lamented to this writer that so few whites attended the grand annual Kite Festival; she was disturbed that only blacks were there.

Franklin Park has not changed; the trees are still green, but people's attitudes towards each other have. Olmsted's greatest fear was that Franklin Park would deteriorate because of internal isolation. In his 1881 Report to the Park Commissioners, he wrote:

It is not uncommon to hear [the Park] referred to as if it were to be a special property of

the West Roxbury community.... If this were just, the project would not be worthy of a moment's consideration.

The majority of people who live around Franklin Park today are black residents. Logically, the majority of people who use Franklin Park are black residents. Yet a full mile of Franklin Park abuts a largely white community. This community avoids Franklin Park by choice. Whites have no cultural history of being a minority, and so to them, Franklin Park is a so-called "black province." This is simplistic, if not racist, but it is a fact of Boston life; a tragic myth propagated by the news media, the police, environmental institutions, many city officials, and so-called community leaders.

III.

We have now seen one hundred years of the history and development of Franklin Park. We have seen that Franklin Park does not exist in a vacuum but is shaped and molded by cultural changes, demographic patterns, traffic patterns and political shifts. Throughout this past century the basic design of Frederick Law Olmsted has remained intact. His great landscaping forms are now fully matured, although a lot of the Park requires tree care and replanting.

Olmsted would not be surprised at all by the fortunes of Franklin Park. He witnessed and suffered far worse in Central Park. In a letter to Elizabeth Baldwin Whitney on December 16, 1890, Olmsted evaluated his career:

There are, scattered through the country, seventeen large public parks upon which I have been engaged. After we have left them, they have, in the majority of cases, been more or less barbarously treated, yet as they stand they are a hundred years ahead of any spontaneous public demand....

Parks were designed for the people of a city, and Olmsted knew that without their support and cooperation his parks were doomed. The one lesson from this long history is that the public bears the largest responsibility for the success of a city park.

Franklin Park's design and construction, its prime, decline and revival, were and are marked by the will of Boston residents, who, as Olmsted always insisted, are the owners of a city's park. The very idea of Franklin Park was the will of Bostonians, led by Alderman Hugh O'Brien. Scarborough Pond, the Franklin Park

Zoo and the Golf Course are all in Franklin Park because of public demand. The present revival is under way because residents want it, too.

The fact remains for all who care to see it that Franklin Park continues to serve Bostonians exactly as it was intended to in 1885. Thousands of people enjoy Franklin Park all year long - black, white, and hispanic - without conflict. They jog and golf, play tennis, baseball and football; they visit the Zoo and they picnic with their families. Little kids catch frogs in Scarborough Pond and horseback riders use the bridle paths. More capital improvements for the Park's rehabilitation are forthcoming.

All is in place for Franklin Park's second century, with Olmsted's intentions and most of his design intact.

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